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SERVICE DATE - APRIL 23, 2004

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB Docket No. AB-347 (Sub-No. 3X)

Florida West Coast Railroad Company, Inc.
Abandonment and Discontinuance of Service Exemption -- in Alachua and Gilchrist Counties,
FL

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Florida West Coast Railroad Company, Inc. (FWCR) has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment and discontinuation of service of approximately 13 miles of railroad. The proposed abandonment extends from milepost 734.0 in Trenton, Florida and milepost 721.0 in Newberry, Florida, located in Alachua and Gilchrist Counties. A map depicting the line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

FWCR began operations in December 1987 on approximately 44 miles of track obtained from CSX Corporations, Inc. (CSXT). The current line represents the remaining portion of FWCR's main line. The right of way comprising the line is typically 60 to 100 feet in width. The area served by the rail line is rural in nature with a low population. According to FWCR, the line does not included federally granted rights-of-way. Over the last couple of years, rail traffic on the line has diminished markedly making the continued operation of the line unprofitable.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The railroad has submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. The railroad has served the environmental and historical reports on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have investigated and reviewed the record in this proceeding.

The National Geodetic Survey has submitted comments stating that eight geodetic station markers may be affected by the proposed abandonment and requests 90 days notification in advance of any activities that may disturb or destroy these markers.

FWCR states that it has been contacted by the Trust for Public Land, a non-profit organization with an interest in trails use of abandoned lines. FWCR thus believes that the line may be suitable for conversion to certain public purposes, including recreational trails.

Traffic

According to FWCR, Southern States Coop, Inc., and GroMore Farm Service, Inc. are the only customers that remain on the line. FWCR has indicated that these businesses shipped 33 carloads combined on the line during 2003. Using the traffic data from this same year, the proposed abandonment could result in the conversion of 33 railcars to truck traffic per year. Using a conversion factor of 4 trucks per railcar,¹ SEA calculated that, if all the rail traffic is diverted to truck traffic, about 132 loaded trucks per year or 264 total trucks (assuming an empty backhaul) could be added to area roadways annually.

HISTORIC REVIEW

The railroad submitted an historic report as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.8(a)]. The railroad served the report on the Florida State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8(c). The SHPO has submitted comments stating that no historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) would be affected by the proposed abandonment. We have reviewed the report and the information provided by the SHPO and concur with the SHPO's comments.

Pursuant to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations for implementing the section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act at 36 CFR 800.4(d)(1) and 36 CFR 800.8, we have determined that the proposed abandonment will not affect historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. The documentation for this finding, as specified at 36 CFR 800.11(d), consists of the railroad's historic report, all relevant correspondence, and this EA, which have been provided to the SHPO and made available to the public.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that the following environmental condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

¹ The conversion factor is an estimate used to calculate the rail to truck conversion of varied commodities.

1. The National Geodetic Survey (NGS), has identified 8 geodetic station markers that may be affected by the proposed abandonment. Therefore FWCR shall notify NGS 90 days prior to salvage activities in order to plan for their relocation.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended condition is imposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within the time specified in the Federal Register notice. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact the Office of Public Services directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Catherine Glidden, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-347 (Sub-No. 3X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If

you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Catherine Glidden, the environmental contact for this case, by phone at (202) 565-1542, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at gliddenc@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: **April 23, 2004**

Comment due date: May 24, 2004 (30 days)

By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

